

Nicaragua *alumni*

Alumni Spotlight

A Snapshot of a Great Woman

Fulbright Alumna Margarita Montealegre

A great smile, a good chat and inspiring stories await you when you visit Margarita Montealegre's work place. Her studio is cozy and hospitable, a great place to talk about the bold adventures that led her to experiences in the U.S. as a Fulbright scholar in Documental Photography at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) in 2002, and later as a Visiting Scholar at Hampden Sydney College (H-SC) in 2010.

Among her many accomplishments, Margarita is the first female photojournalist in Nicaragua. Starting her career in 1977, she interned at the major newspaper *La Prensa*, positioning herself in the right place and time to document the events that led to the civil war in Nicaragua in 1979. Faced with the machismo culture of the time, and being just a student of journalism, she lived the war through her camera lens in the dense foliage of the forests. In 1979, the Organization of International Journalism awarded her the First World Prize in Actuality for her coverage of Nicaraguan political events, riots and the war.

In 1981, Margarita traveled to the U.S. after being awarded a scholarship by the International Center of Photography based in New York where she attended seven months of training. She took advantage of this opportunity to gain a formal education in photojournalism and polish her natural skills. Taking her edu-

cation one step further, she shared what she had learned with others through presentations at events like the FotoFest International in Houston in 1989.

Margarita describes the 1990s as a turning point in her career. After receiving a scholarship from the Swedish Organization of Photographers and completing several months of formal film development training, she decided to enter the field of teaching. Her desire to share her experience and knowledge with others established her as a well-respected teacher of photography in local universities and abroad. Around this time, she also opened her commercial photography studio where she was hired to cover the visits to Nicaragua of world leaders like Pope John Paul II in 1997 and then-President Bill Clinton in 1999.

In 2002, Margarita felt the need to further her formal education in photography and the Fulbright Graduate scholarship program offered the perfect opportunity to achieve her goals. In the past, she had learned about photography, studied other world-renowned photographers, and perfected different



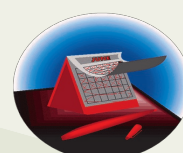
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different techniques. Now, she wanted photography to become the medium through which she documented all aspects of the life and history of Nicaragua. To accomplish this, she applied for and received a prestigious Fulbright scholarship through the U.S. Embassy and, with her daughter in tow, embarked on a life-changing experience, at VCU in Richmond, Virginia.

Margarita extended her education to learning about the town around her. She subscribed to the local newspaper to find out about upcoming events and ventured out to these activities to learn about the community and its life through her lens. She spent most of her time documenting everyday life, family events, and social activities in the “Fan” district of Richmond. This constant contact allowed her access to take impressive pictures that told the life of the town in beautiful black and white compositions. According to Margarita, “to photograph many daily activities in Richmond allowed me to meet individuals who later became my best advisers in my projects.”

Margarita learned to adapt to a new culture, friends, school, and language because she believed it was important “to break barriers of communication and culture [...] to talk and exchange experiences of my country with different people. The Fulbright [experience] allowed me, for the first time, to look for my own images, not for a client, but for my personal project.” Upon graduation from VCU, her avid search for more opportunities to further her skills earned her a scholarship to study at the Photography Institute’s 2004 National Graduate Seminar at Columbia University. This was a great distinction as she was one of 20 fellows chosen among 91 finalists from 46 U.S. graduate programs.

Upon returning home to Managua, Margarita fulfilled her long-term goal and presented not one, but two major solo exhibits in Nicaragua funded by the Fulbright program. The first took place at the Institute of History in 2004 and the second at the National Ruben Dario Theater in 2005. Margarita was bound to return to Virginia, and had no idea it would be her Fulbright experience that would lead to her next U.S. journey.

Hampden Sydney College (H-SC) is a small, private campus, picturesquely set in Virginia’s historic Southside, 70 miles southwest of Richmond. The campus started in 1775 with a male-only enrollment, and the tradition continues to this day. “It is close to a

town called Farmville, and I thought ‘This must be a joke’ you know with Facebook and the game with the same name being so popular” remembers Margarita with laugh.

When Margarita was studying at VCU, she was invited to give a lecture at H-SC and made good friends with a couple of faculty members there. When the time came for H-SC’s Fine Arts’ Department to have a Visiting Scholar, one of the faculty remembered her unique black and white photography style and the department invited her to teach at H-SC for a full academic year. Thrilled with the opportunity to share her knowledge, Margarita not only taught, but also served as a tutor for students taking Spanish classes and

guest lecturer around town. She even visited the nearby campus of Longwood University to participate in a panel discussion with other faculty experts on the topic “Central America: Nicaragua in Geographical and Historical Context” as part of a symposium initiative on Nicaragua

that was later presented at the H-SC campus.

Margarita exhibited her work at H-SC’s Crawley Forum as part of a symposium screening of “Images of Insurrection & Revolution in Nicaragua” and at the Atkinson Museum in Farmville as part of the art exhibit opening “Photographic Works by Margarita Montealegre and Dave Woody.” She especially enjoyed her volunteer time at the local women’s precinct, where she took photos for the inmates’ résumés as part of a re-integration project supported by H-SC.

Margarita talks very fondly of H-SC remembering the relationship among all the faculty as one of collaboration and support. She felt included and appreciated. She also was stunned with how much interest people showed in Latin American issues and took pleasure in having the opportunity to share a piece of Nicaragua. Most of all she enjoyed teaching her passion for photography while getting to know her students.

“I was living in a town called Farmville, and at first I thought ‘This must be a joke’ you know with Facebook and the game with the same name being so popular”



Margarita presenting a dazzling selection of photos to the School of Art students at the Palacio de Cultura. The photos showcased some of her personal work in Virginia during her Fulbright experience. Great shots!



2012 Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund Offers \$1 Million Dollars to Alumni!

The second annual Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund (AEIF) will offer \$1,000,000 to help teams of alumni tackle some of the world's most pressing issues! Administered by the State Department's Alumni Affairs Division, AEIF awards up to \$25,000 per winning team.

All alumni are invited to submit first-round proposals between February 27, 2011 and March 30, 2012, at <https://alumni.state.gov/aeif>. The Alumni Affairs Division will list the finalists on April 16, 2012, inviting alumni to vote on their favorite proposal. AEIF award winners will be announced by mid-May 2012.

Steps to Start



Identify the themes for your country or region. Proposals must be submitted on only one theme.



Submit your proposal between **February 27, 2012 and March 30, 2012**.



Form a team by **March 30, 2012** of 10 or more alumni (or current participants) of U.S. government-funded exchange programs.



Browse proposals by region, theme or keyword.



Comment on proposals. Discuss, provide critiques and suggestions.



Revise your proposal and add team members. Proposals and revisions must be submitted by **March 30, 2012**.

What's going on...

Recent Alumni News



➡ **Bonne Chance Oscar Smith!**

SUSI Alumnus Oscar Smith has been selected for a Teaching Assistant opportunity to take place in France in 2013. He will be teaching Spanish and furthering his knowledge in French language skills. As he said "Just like my SUSI experience, this is another great experience for me."

➡ **Professional Alumni Reception**

More than 170 alumni were in attendance at our annual Professional Alumni Reception on Tuesday, January 24, honoring participants from the following U.S. government scholarship programs: Fulbright Program, International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), Teaching and Excellence Achievement (TEA) Program, Study of the United States Institutes (SUSI) for High School Educators, and SUSI for Scholars.

➡ **Fulbright Alumnus Gonzalo Norori Facilitates Lecture on Investigative Reporting to Local University Students**

Fulbrighter Gonzalo Norori facilitated the visit of Investigative Reporting Expert Lynne Walker to Universidad Centroamericana (UCA), a very prestigious university in Nicaragua. Ms. Walker gave a lively speech to over a hundred journalism students and faculty members. She interacted with the students and shared with them her experience as an investigative journalist in Mexico and the United States. Also, she talked about what to do and what not to do when using new media for investigative reporting. Thank you Gonzalo!



Photo Gallery



UGRAD Alumna, Perla Centeno, giving a taste of Nicaraguan folk dances during her U.S. experience.



CCI Alumni Danik Garcia, Uriel Lopez, Cecilia Reconco, and David Gutierrez at the 2011 Youth Alumni Reception.



IVLP Alumni Jackeline Perez and Yorling Aguilar posing with President Obama.

Calendar of Activities

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8 	9	10
11	12	13	14	15 	16	17
18	19  Application Submissions due: Access Students	20  "Women's History Month" by Mary Swartz at CCNN at 6:30 pm	21	22 	23	24
25	26  Gender Violence Speaker March 26-30, 2012	27	28	29	30  Projects DUE!	March 30: Application Submissions due: -TEA 2012 -Access Teachers

CALLING ALL ALUMNI!

We want to hear from you. You are our best source!

- * Send us your photos and impressions during your U.S. exchange experience.
- * Tell us about your recent projects and achievements.

E-Mail: Shany Mariel de Aguirre

PerezSM@state.gov

(505) 2252-7100 Ext. 7673

VISIT OUR WEBSITE
Exchange Opportunities



Happening NOW!
Accepting applications

⇒ English Access Micro-scholarship Program for students and teachers

Deadlines
Students: March 19, 2012
Teachers: March 30, 2012

⇒ Fulbright Program
Deadline: April 25, 2012

⇒ Teaching Excellence and Achievement Program (TEA)
Deadline: April 30, 2012

Information and applications available online:

http://spanish.nicaragua.embassy.gov/programa_becas.html

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Also important information about visas and other services.

<http://www.facebook.com/embusanic>